

CANCER Consortium

A PERIODIC UPDATE OF PROGRESS AND EVENTS

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Board of Directors Honored in Washington, D.C.



At the Ambassador's Residence (left to right): Dr. Andrew von Eschenbach, Director of the National Cancer Institute; Dr. Henrietta Campbell, Chief Medical Officer, Northern Ireland; Sean O'Huiginn, Ambassador of Ireland; and Dr. Tony Holohan, Deputy Chief Medical Officer, Ireland. (See story on page 2.)

Ireland Invests in Cancer Research

Clinical trials are essential to the advancement of cancer care. A primary goal of the Consortium is to enhance the capacity of the island of Ireland to conduct cancer clinical trials both locally and internationally.

In Northern Ireland, the reorganisation of clinical cancer services in the late 1990s laid the groundwork for an expansion of clinical trial activity. Four regional cancer units were established at Altnagelvin, Antrim, Ulster, and Craigavon Hospitals. In addition, the development of a state-of-the-art cancer centre at Belfast City Hospital was begun and is scheduled for completion in 2005.

These changes created an infrastructure for a clinical trials programme that is now under way.

As a complement to the network that already exists in Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland is expanding its cancer research infrastructure. In November 2001, the Health Research Board (HRB) in Dublin made funding available to hospitals interested in developing centres for clinical cancer research. The following hospitals received awards:

- St. Vincent's University Hospital/St. Luke's Hospital, Dublin
- University College Hospital, Galway
- Cork University Hospital
- Beaumont Hospital, Dublin

Two smaller planning awards were made to the Mid-Western Regional Hospital, Limerick, and to Mater Misericordiae Hospital, Dublin. Hospitals have since been actively engaged in staff recruitment and training.

"This is the first time public funding has been made available for clinical trials in Irish hospitals," said Dr. Ruth Barrington, Chief Executive of the HRB.

In February 2002, in order to encourage the participation of other hospitals, the HRB initiated a second call for proposals from hospitals interested in developing their clinical trial capabilities. The application process is now closed. This summer an expert panel will review applications and select additional hospitals to receive awards. The panel is seeking hospitals that meet a number of standards, including current service to cancer patients, links with academic institutions, the commitment of hospital management and medical and nursing staff, and the existence of a well-functioning research ethics committee. Funding for the second call totals €3 million.

Members of the Consortium, and particularly the Clinical Trials Working Group, are seeking to establish an all-island cancer clinical trials network, including a statistical and data management centre. This network is being modeled after NCI's cooperative groups, which conduct trials from multiple locations in the United States. Plans are under way to create a headquarters that would support the cooperative group. The expanded and strengthened network of cancer centres in Northern Ireland and Ireland will utilise net-Trials™, a clinical trials information system developed by NCI for its intramural clinical research programme.

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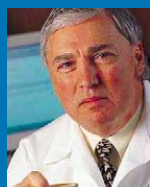
Board of Directors Honored in Washington, D.C.



Secretary Tommy Thompson of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services addresses guests at embassy reception.

In April 2002, the Ambassador of Ireland, Sean O'Huiginn, hosted the Consortium at his residence in Washington, D.C., in honor of the members of the Board of Directors. The reception heralded the conclusion of meetings of the Consortium's Board and Implementation Group. U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services, Tommy G. Thompson, voiced his support of the Consortium and its efforts to improve cancer care in Northern Ireland and Ireland.

Consortium Welcomes Dr. Andrew von Eschenbach to Board



Dr. Andrew von Eschenbach

Dr. Andrew von Eschenbach, an internationally recognised urologic surgeon, was welcomed as a new member of the Board of Directors in January 2002, when he joined NCI as its 12th director.

Before coming to NCI, Dr. von Eschenbach directed the Genitourinary Cancer Center and the Prostate Cancer Research Program at the University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center. He was also president-elect of the American Cancer Society.

Upon his arrival at NCI, Dr. von Eschenbach was asked if he had any major overall goals for the Institute. He noted that early in his career, when he was in training and practise as an oncologist, he and his colleagues were dedicated "to finding cancer and killing it." Now, he sees the goal of NCI as not only to eradicate cancer but "to target and control it by modulating and altering the behaviour of cancer."

NCI's role in the Consortium, according to Dr. von Eschenbach, is one of friendship and partnership. It is NCI's charge to export the advantages of its biomedical research programmes in an appropriate and sensitive way. He noted that NCI will continue to collaborate with Ireland and Northern Ireland in the Consortium's efforts to seek mutual solutions to cancer.

Consortium Offers Training Opportunities

A cadre of well-trained cancer research specialists is crucial to the improvement of cancer care on the island of Ireland. The Consortium is pursuing creation of a wide variety of training and fellowship opportunities for cancer specialists from Ireland and Northern Ireland. Substantial progress has been made in three training areas: clinical trials, cancer epidemiology, and prevention. Following is a round-up of past, current, and future activities.

Clinical Trials

A clinical trials training programme was established as part of the Consortium's effort to create capacity for clinical cancer research on the island. Three clinical oncology nurses—Catherine O'Brien (St. James's Hospital), Marie Sheehan (Mid-Western Health Board), and Naomi Hill (Belfast City Hospital)—completed the three-month programme in April 2002 in the United States. During that time, the nurses rotated between the NCI Clinical Center and its branch at the National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland. The nurses described their experiences at NCI as "rich" and "full."

The educational programme is designed to give oncology nurses with degrees a chance to experience all aspects of working in a cancer clinical trials centre. During their U.S. training, the nurses, with the help of local oncology nurse-preceptors, focused on managing clinical trials as part of a team.

In May 2002, the Nursing Working Group held an "Information Day" in Dublin to showcase Consortium training opportunities, including the clinical trials training programme. Interested applicants were in attendance. The Consortium plans to send four more nurses to the United States by the end of the year to receive clinical trials training.



Nurses from Ireland and Northern Ireland with their U.S. counterparts (left to right): Georgie Cusack, National Cancer Institute, U. S.; Catherine O'Brien, St. James's Hospital, Dublin, Ireland; Kim Scott, National Cancer Institute, U.S.; Marie Sheehan, Mid-Western Health Board, Limerick, Ireland; Nicole Drbohlav, National Cancer Institute, U.S.; Naomi Hill, Belfast City Hospital, Belfast, Northern Ireland; and Miranda Raggio, National Cancer Institute, U.S.

Cancer Epidemiology

The first epidemiology fellows, Dr. Peter McCarron of Northern Ireland and Dr. Paul Walsh of Ireland, concluded their postdoctoral study in cancer epidemiology at NCI and are translating their experiences into cancer research projects on the island. Utilising data from the Northern Ireland Cancer Registry in Belfast, Dr. McCarron plans to study patterns of care for either prostate cancer or lung cancer. Dr. Walsh is developing a project on breast cancer survival with the Irish National Cancer Registry in Cork. It is anticipated that the fellows will help to direct collaborative clinical research activity on the island of Ireland, which is a long-term strategy of the Consortium. Efforts are already under way to select the next round of fellows. Candidates will interview in October 2002 to commence their fellowships in the local registries in early 2003 and at NCI in mid-2003.

Prevention

Promoting prevention in the management of cancer is a long-term goal of the Consortium and, as a result, the Consortium encourages scholar exchange in the area of prevention. In 2001, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland funded 16 positions for NCI's Summer Curriculum in Cancer Prevention. The five-week annual course includes a four-week segment on the principles and practices of cancer prevention and a one-week segment on molecular prevention.

The principles and practices course covers the resources, data, methods, and theories related to cancer prevention and control. It includes an international day for participants from around the globe to present to their colleagues the unique characteristics of cancer care and prevention in their home countries. The molecular prevention segment provides participants with information on molecular biology and the genetics of cancer as well as an overview of basic laboratory approaches in epidemiology, bionutrition, chemoprevention, biomarkers, and translational research. The faculty consists of approximately 100 experts from the National Institutes of Health (NIH), NCI, other government agencies, academia, cancer centres, and public and private organisations.

This year, 15 Irish and 3 Northern Irish applicants, including physicians, nurses, research fellows, lecturers, and data analysts participated in the summer programme. Information for next year will be available by early spring 2003.

Dr. Douglas Weed, the coordinator of NCI's Summer Curriculum in Cancer Prevention, serves also as the leader of the Consortium's Prevention Working Group. For information on the working group, see "Consortium Establishes Prevention Working Group."

Future Scholar Exchange and Training

The Consortium is exploring other fellowship opportunities for radiologists, medical oncologists, molecular pathologists, and basic scientists. For some of these fellowships, the Consortium is investigating the potential for collaboration with the Royal College of Surgeons and the Royal College of Physicians in Dublin. NCI has numerous

basic science positions available in its laboratories at the Center for Cancer Research in Bethesda, Maryland. Interested junior and senior basic scientists from the island may pursue cancer research training through this mechanism. In addition, the Nursing Working Group is finalising the requirements for an international cancer nursing research fellowship programme that would entail research at NCI and at home on the island of Ireland. Fellowships will be advertised in September and October 2002. Interested candidates should plan to submit applications in January 2003 and be prepared to begin their fellowships the following September.

Irish Hospitals Plan Implementation of Telesynergy™



Installing Telesynergy™ at Belfast City Hospital: Seated (left to right): Philip Leighton, Senior Systems Specialist, Information Technology Department, Belfast City Hospital; Laurence Nolan, Biomedical Service Manager, Belfast Link Laboratories. Standing: Kevin Brannigan, Medical Technical Officer, Northern Ireland Medical Physics Agency.

Belfast City Hospital and St. Luke's Hospital in Dublin are implementing Telesynergy™ a multimedia medical imaging workstation that combines cameras, microscopes, audio equipment, and a variety of peripheral devices. The system provides high-resolution display of images from multiple medical modalities in both real-time and store-and-forward modes. It enables scientists in multiple laboratories and in multiple locations to interact simultaneously with one another.

The overarching goal of Telesynergy™ is to facilitate professional collaboration and educate medical experts and research professionals about cancer research protocols and clinical care. Its installation on the island of Ireland will be the first time the system has been used outside of the United States.

Both hospitals are expected to have their systems fully operational this summer. The hospitals have formed a joint users' group and in fall 2002, members of the users' group will meet with American counterparts in the U.S. to learn more about Telesynergy™ and its applications from those experienced in its operation.

For further information on Telesynergy™ see *Broadcast Quality Teleconferencing for Oncology*, authored by Dr. James J. A. McAleer, Mr. Desmond O'Loan, and Dr. Donal P. Hollywood, in *The Oncologist*, 2001, Volume 6, pages 459–462. This article is available online at www.theoncologist.com.

Consortium Welcomes New Members



Professor Robert Stout

Professor Robert Stout, Director of Research and Development for Northern Ireland Health and Personal Social Services, became a member of the Consortium's Implementation Group in

September 2001. Prior to his appointment as Director of Research and Development, he was Dean of the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences at Queen's University from 1991 to 2001. Professor Stout was educated at Campbell College and Queen's University Belfast, graduating in medicine with honours in 1965. He then undertook clinical training in general medicine in the Belfast teaching hospitals and started his research career in the Department of Medicine at Queen's University. In 1976, he was appointed to the new Chair of Geriatric Medicine at Queen's University. He has developed undergraduate and postgraduate training in geriatric medicine and established research programmes in aging and the care of elderly people, covering such areas as atherosclerosis, stroke, dementia, osteoporosis, and health care research.

Ms. Mary McCarthy joined the Consortium as a member of the Implementation Group in October 2001 when she was named Chief Nursing Officer at the Department of Health and Children. She is a registered nurse and midwife with a clinical background in intensive care. She worked in nursing management for 12 years. Prior to joining the Department of Health and Children, she was Director of Nursing at the Adelaide and Meath Hospital, which was created when three hospitals in Dublin's centre merged. She was responsible for merging nursing services and for commissioning a number of key critical care and medical services.



Ms. Mary McCarthy

The Consortium extends a warm welcome to its new members.

Highlights

Consortium Members Conduct Research Using Registry Data

The incidence of oesophageal cancer is increasing in Northern Ireland, and its etiology is poorly understood. Dr. Harry Comber and Dr. Liam Murray are serving as principal investigators on an all-Ireland case-control study of oesophageal adenocarcinoma and Barrett's oesophagus, a nonmalignant precursor. The study, known as FINBAR (Factors Influencing Barrett's Adenocarcinoma Relationships), will make use of 10 years of data housed at the Northern Ireland Cancer Registry. The project is funded by a cross-border grant of the Health Research Board in Dublin and the Research and Development Office of the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety in Belfast. It is anticipated that the study will shed light on the apparent increase in oesophageal adenocarcinoma and on the determinants of progression to malignancy.

NCI Welcomes Irish Colleagues for Prevention Training

NCI hosted an 18-member delegation from Ireland and from Northern Ireland at this summer's cancer prevention training programme. Two courses were offered on NCI's campus: *Principles and Practice of Cancer Prevention and Control* and *Molecular Prevention*. The principles and practise course took place from 1 July to 2 August 2002, and the molecular prevention course took place from 5 August to 9 August 2002. For additional information on NCI's annual summer prevention curriculum, visit www.allirelandnci.org.

Interest Grows in Palliative Care in Ireland and United States

Improving the delivery of palliative and supportive care services to persons with cancer is a priority for Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, and the United States. Indeed, all three jurisdictions recently published reports on the subject. In Northern Ireland in May 2000, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety issued *Partnerships in Caring: Standards for Service*, which reviewed the state of palliative care services in Northern Ireland and made recommendations for future directions. In Ireland in 1999, the Minister for Health and Children established the National Advisory Committee on Palliative Care, which in October 2001 released a report entitled *Report of the National Advisory Committee on Palliative Care*. And in June 2001, the U.S. Institute of Medicine issued its report, *Improving Palliative Care for Cancer*.

This summer, NIH sponsored a State-of-the-Science Conference on Symptom Management in Cancer: Pain, Depression, and Fatigue. The Consortium recognised the opportunity to explore initiatives related to palliative care. As a result, a delegation from Ireland and from Northern Ireland attended the NIH conference and met with representatives of NCI to discuss tripartite palliative care activities.

As a first step toward integrating palliative care into the purview of the Consortium, the All Ireland Fatigue Coalition (AIFC) was endorsed by the Consortium in April 2002. AIFC is a multidisciplinary team of oncology professionals from Northern Ireland and Ireland, and its mission is to promote the proactive management of cancer-related fatigue.

Consortium Establishes Prevention Working Group



Dr. Douglas Weed

In December 2001, the Board of Directors agreed to establish a new working group that would focus on prevention. The mission of the group is to enhance coordination and cooperation on primary, secondary, and tertiary cancer prevention research and practise activities on an all-island basis. The group stays abreast of prevention-related needs on the island and makes recommendations that will advance the Consortium's objectives. The prevention of cancer has been an interest of the Consortium since its inception.

The group's first meeting was held at the offices of the Health Research Board in Dublin in May 2002. The chair of the new group is Dr. Douglas Weed, Chief, Office of Preventive Oncology, Division of Cancer Prevention, NCI. Membership includes 10 individuals representing public health institutions, health promotion agencies, cancer registries, and NCI:

- Dr. Kevin Balanda, Institute of Public Health in Ireland, Dublin
- Dr. Ruth Barrington, Health Research Board, Dublin
- Dr. Margaret Boyle, Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Belfast
- Dr. Brian Gaffney, Health Promotion Agency, Belfast
- Dr. Fenton Howell, North Eastern Health Board, Co. Meath
- Dr. Scott Leischow, National Cancer Institute, Bethesda (U.S.A)
- Dr. Elizabeth Mitchell, Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Belfast
- Dr. Liam Murray, Queen's University Belfast
- Dr. Patricia Riordan, Irish National Cancer Registry, Cork
- Dr. Kathy Rowe, Queen's University Belfast

At their May meeting, working group members discussed activities in their respective jurisdictions and began to formulate initiatives that could be undertaken by the Consortium. Members are planning a series of workshops that focus on the prevention of specific cancers. Initial workshops may, for example, address those cancers that utilise the greatest amount of resources or that have the highest rates of morbidity and mortality as described in the Consortium-sponsored all-island registry report. Further, members identified as a priority the establishment of a cancer prevention fellowship programme to train individuals from multiple health science disciplines as a means for achieving the Consortium's goals.

What's Next?

- Expansion of the scholar exchange programme
- Further development of cancer clinical trials centres on the island
- Integration of Telesynergy™ into practice at hospitals in the North and South
- Publication of the Consortium's 2001–2002 annual report
- Participation in the Cancer Care Ireland conference in Belfast in October 2002
- Sponsorship of a Telesynergy™ summit in November 2002
- Planning for the Consortium's second NCI All-Ireland Cancer Conference to be held in Cork, Ireland, on 20, 21, and 22 October 2003

Announcements

- The 2001–2002 annual report is due for release in fall 2002 and will be available online. The Consortium published its first annual report for the years 2000–2001 in September 2001. The report details the origins of the Consortium, funding for Consortium initiatives, how the Consortium operates, health services on the island of Ireland, Consortium programmes, and participants.
- In 2001, two articles related to the Consortium were published. The first, "The NCI-Ireland Consortium: A Unique International Partnership in Cancer Care," was authored by Dr. Patrick G. Johnston and Dr. Peter A. Daly. The second, "Broadcast Quality Teleconferencing for Oncology," was authored by Dr. James J. A. McAleer, Mr. Desmond O'Loan, and Dr. Donal P. Hollywood. Both articles appeared in Volume 6 of *The Oncologist* and are available online at www.theoncologist.com.



Participants in the first meeting of the new Prevention Working Group: Back row, left to right: Dr. Kevin Balanda, Institute of Public Health in Ireland; Dr. Fenton Howell, North Eastern Health Board, Ireland; Dr. Douglas Weed, National Cancer Institute, U.S.; Dr. Liam Murray, Department of Epidemiology, Queen's University Belfast, Northern Ireland; Dr. Brian Gaffney, Health Promotion Agency, Northern Ireland. Front row, left to right: Dr. Teresa Maguire, Health Research Board, Ireland; Dr. Patricia Riordan, National Cancer Registry, Ireland; Dr. Kathy Rowe, Queen's University Belfast, Northern Ireland; and Dr. Ruth Barrington, Health Research Board, Ireland.

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This newsletter is published periodically by the Ireland-Northern Ireland-National Cancer Institute Cancer Consortium and distributed in Ireland, Northern Ireland, and the United States. The Consortium welcomes your comments and suggestions.

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